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EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE

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D-80298 MÜNCHEN,

GERMANY

Turin, November 13, 2003

Our Case E-1639/03

Re: International Application No. PCT/EP03/50113
 G.D SOCIETA' PER AZIONI

Dear Sirs,

according to Art. 34(2)(b) and Rule 66.1(b) of the Patent Cooperation Treaty, we submit a voluntary amendment of the International Patent Application in object; please find enclosed herewith a copy of new pages 1-2 and 9-13 replacing the corresponding original pages 1-2 and 9-13.

The disclosure of the application in object was amended for identifying the most relevant prior art.

Independent claim 1 was amended in order to encompass the subject matter of original claims 3 and 4 (now deleted); independent claim 15 (original independent claim 17) was amended in order to encompass the subject matter of original claim 29 (now deleted) and some of the subject matter of original claim 1.

Owing to the above amendments, we believe that the application is now in order for acceptance.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Ing. Paolo JORIO

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METHOD OF PACKING PACKETS OF CIGARETTES, AND SHEET OF
PACKING MATERIAL FOR IMPLEMENTING SUCH A METHOD

TECHNICAL FIELD

5 The present invention relates to a method of packing packets of cigarettes.

More specifically, the present invention relates to a method of packing an orderly group of packets of cigarettes in a sheet of packing material to form a 10 carton of cigarettes, to which the following description refers purely by way of example.

BACKGROUND ART

Cartons of cigarettes normally comprise ten packets of cigarettes arranged in an orderly parallelepiped-15 shaped group, which is enclosed in a sheet of paper or in a cardboard blank, and is then wrapped in a sheet of transparent heat-seal plastic material, normally polypropylene.

Each packet of cigarettes is printed on the outer 20 surface with the trademark and brand name of the cigarettes, maker's details, and all compulsory information required by law, and which, in particular, comprises the content of the cigarettes and a government health warning.

25 Since legal requirements vary from one country to another, the information printed on the packet must be adapted accordingly.

And the same also applies to cartons, so that the carton packing material (sheet of paper or cardboard

blank) must be adapted to each individual country.

US4784261 discloses a cigarette package having a desired number of individual packets which are wrapped by a clear cellophane wrapper to provide a single package; 5 each of the individual packets contains a predetermined quantity of cigarettes. An advertising card is provided between the individual packets which in turn forms a part of the completed package upon wrapping of the package itself.

10 DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of packing packets of cigarettes, designed to reduce the cost of conforming with the legal requirements of individual countries.

15 According to the present invention, there is provided a method of packing packets of cigarettes as recited by Claim 1.

The present invention also relates to a sheet of packing material for implementing the packing method as 20 claimed in Claim 1.

According to the present invention, there is provided a sheet of packing material as recited by Claim 17.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

25 A non-limiting embodiment of the present invention will be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows a view in perspective, with parts removed for clarity, of an orderly group of packets of

CLAIMS

1) A method of packing an orderly group (1) of packets (2) of cigarettes; the method comprising the
5 steps of folding a sheet (11) of heat-seal transparent plastic packing material about the orderly group (1) to form a tubular wrapping having two tubular portions (21) projecting with respect to the orderly group (1), each tubular portion (21) comprising four flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f), folding each flap (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) onto the orderly group (1), so as to at least partly superimpose said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f), and sealing the superimposed flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) to one another; the orderly group (1) being packed solely in the
15 sheet (11) of transparent packing material, so that the packets (2) are visible through the sheet (11) of packing material; the method being characterized in that at least an outer flap (18d) has a portion (19) bearing graphics (20) and said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) are sealed by
20 melting the sheet (11) of packing material to define at least one bead seal (22, 23, 24, 25) outwards of said graphics (20).

2) A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said orderly group (1) has two main faces (8), two lateral
25 faces (9), and two end faces (10); said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) being superimposed on said end faces (10).

3) A method as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, wherein said at least one bead seal (22, 23, 24, 25) defines an endless path (26) surrounding said graphics (20).

4) A method as claimed in Claim 3, wherein said endless path (26) is defined by a number of adjacent bead seals (22, 23, 24, 25).

5) A method as claimed in Claim 4, wherein said adjacent bead seals (22, 23, 24, 25) overlap.

6) A method as claimed in any one of Claims 3 to 5, wherein each said bead seal (22, 23, 24, 25) is located close to an edge of said orderly group (1).

7) A method as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 6, 10 wherein said sheet (11) of packing material comprises a central panel (12), and two lateral panels (13) separated ideally from the central panel (12) by two ideal fold lines (14); the method comprising forming slits (16) along the lateral panels (13), and which extend between 15 the edges of the sheet (11) of packing material and said ideal fold lines (14) to define a number of portions (18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e) defining said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f).

8) A method as claimed in Claim 7, wherein each slit 20 (16) is formed by cutting said sheet (11) of packing material.

9) A method as claimed in Claim 7, wherein each slit (16) is formed by cutting and blanking to remove part of the sheet (11) of packing material.

25 10) A method as claimed in Claim 8 or 9, wherein a portion (17) of said sheet (11) of packing material at one end of said slit (16) is thermally perforated and hardened.

11) A method as claimed in Claim 8 or 9, wherein an

adhesive label (27) is applied to said sheet (11) of packing material at one end of said slit (16).

12) A method as claimed in Claim 9, wherein each slit (16) is formed by cutting said sheet (11) of packing material, combined with melting the slit (16) at one end of the slit (16).

13) A method as claimed in Claim 9, wherein each slit (16) is formed by melting part of said sheet (11) of packing material.

10 14) A method as claimed in any one of Claims 7 to 13, wherein the sheet (11) is detached of packing material from a continuous web of heat-seal plastic material.

15 15) A sheet of packing material for implementing the method of packing an orderly group (1) of packets (2) of cigarettes as claimed in any one of Claims from 1 to 14; said sheet (11) being made of transparent heat-seal plastic material and being folded about the orderly group (1) to form a tubular wrapping having two tubular portions (21) projecting with respect to the orderly group (1), each tubular portion (21) comprising four flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f); the flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) being superimposed and sealed to one another; the sheet (11) of packing material comprising a central panel (12), and two lateral panels (13) defining the projecting tubular portions (21) when the sheet (11) of packing material is folded about the orderly group (1) to form a tubular wrapping; the sheet (11) of packing material being characterized in that each lateral panel (13)

having slits (16) dividing the lateral panel (13) into adjacent portions (18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e) defining said flaps (18b, 18c, 18d, 18f) of a respective projecting tubular portion (21); at least one of said portions (18a, 5 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e) having graphics (20).

16) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 15, wherein each lateral panel (13) extends between a free edge of the sheet (11) of packing material and an ideal fold line (14).

10 17) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 16, wherein each slit (16) has a first end located at said free edge, and a second end located between said free edge and said ideal fold line (14).

15 18) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 17, wherein said second end is located at said ideal fold line (14).

19) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 17 or 18, wherein, at said second end, each slit (16) is curved to prevent initiating a tear in said sheet (11) of 20 packing material.

20) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 18, wherein said second end of the slit (16) is defined by an opening (29) bounded by a curved endless edge.

25 21) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 20, wherein said opening (29) is formed by blanking the sheet (11) of packing material.

22) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 20, wherein said opening (29) is formed by melting the sheet (11) of packing material.

23) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 19, wherein said second end of the slit (16) is in the shape of a curved hook (28).

24) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 5 18, wherein each slit (16) is defined by a slot (30) having two opposite edges (31) connected by a curved side (32) at the second end.

25) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 10 16 or 17, and comprising an adhesive label (27) at the second end of each slit (16) to prevent initiating a tear in said sheet (11) of packing material.

26) A sheet of packing material as claimed in Claim 15 16 or 17, and comprising a thermally hardened portion (17) of the sheet (11) of packing material at the second end of each slit (16) to prevent initiating a tear in said sheet (11) of packing material.

27) A sheet of packing material as claimed in any one of Claims 15 to 26, wherein said graphics (20) comprise a bar code.

20 28) A sheet of packing material as claimed in any one of Claims 15 to 27, wherein said graphics (20) are located on a non-transparent portion (19) of said sheet (11) of packing material.

25 29) A sheet of packing material as claimed in any one of Claims 15 to 28, wherein said sheet (11) is made of polypropylene.